

Although the globalization of communism found expression primarily in the second half of the twentieth century, that process began with two quite distinct and different revolutionary upheavals—one in Russia and the other in China—in the first half of that century.

Comparing Revolutions as a Path to Communism

Communist movements of the twentieth century quite self-consciously drew on the mystique of the earlier French Revolution, which suggested that new and better worlds could be constructed by human actions. Like their French predecessors, communist revolutionaries ousted old ruling classes and dispossessed landed aristocracies. Those twentieth-century upheavals also involved vast peasant upheavals in the countryside and an educated leadership with roots in the cities. All three revolutions—French, Russian, and Chinese—found their vision of the good society in a modernizing future, not in some nostalgic vision of the past. Communists also worried lest their revolutions end up in a military dictatorship like that of Napoleon following the French Revolution.

But the communist revolutions were distinctive as well. They were made by highly organized parties guided by a Marxist ideology, were committed to an industrial future, pursued economic as well as political equality, and sought the abolition of private property. In doing so, they mobilized, celebrated, and claimed to act on behalf of society's lower classes—exploited urban workers and impoverished rural peasants. The middle classes, who were the chief beneficiaries of the French Revolution, numbered among the many victims of the communist upheavals. The Russian and Chinese revolutions shared these features, but in other respects they differed sharply from each other.

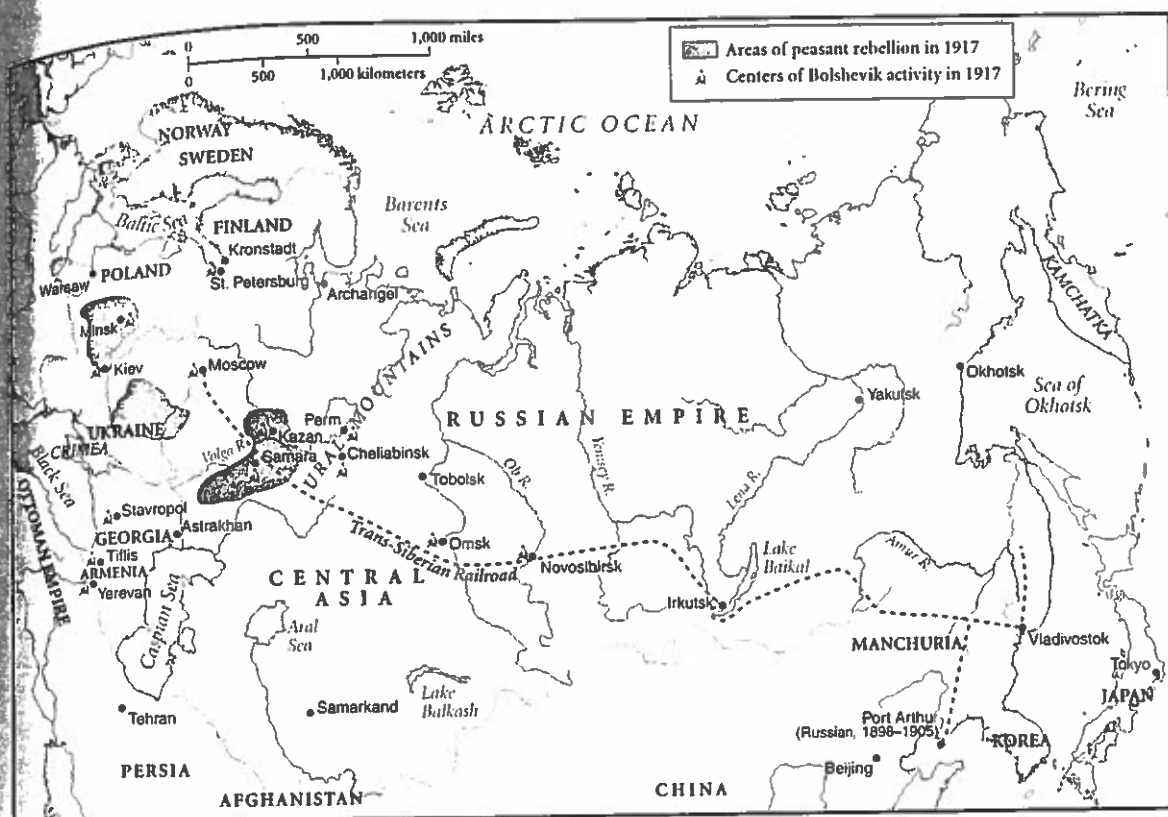
Russia: Revolution in a Single Year

In Russia, communists came to power on the back of a revolutionary upheaval that took place within a single year, 1917. The immense pressures of World War I, which was going very badly for the Russians, represented the catalyst for that revolution as the accumulated tensions of Russian society exploded (see pp. 843–46). Much exploited and suffering from wartime shortages, workers, men and women alike, took to the streets to express their outrage at the incompetence and privileges of their social betters. Activists from various parties, many of them socialist, recruited members, organized demonstrations, published newspapers, and plotted revolution. By February 1917, Tsar Nicholas II had lost almost all support and was forced to abdicate the throne, thus ending the Romanov dynasty, which had ruled Russia for more than three centuries.

That historic event opened the door to a massive social upheaval. Ordinary soldiers, seeking an end to a terrible war and despising their upper-class officers, deserted in substantial numbers. In major industrial centers such as St. Petersburg

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Map 22.1 Russia in 1917
During the First World War, the world's largest state, bridging both Europe and Asia, exploded in revolution in 1917. The Russian Revolution brought to power the twentieth century's first communist government and launched an international communist movement that eventually incorporated about one-third of the world's people.

and Moscow, new trade unions arose to defend workers' interests, and some workers seized control of their factories. Grassroots organizations of workers and soldiers, known as soviets, emerged to speak for ordinary people. Peasants, many of whom had been serfs only a generation or two ago, seized landlords' estates, burned their manor houses, and redistributed the land among themselves. Non-Russian nationalists in Ukraine, Poland, Muslim Central Asia, and the Baltic region demanded greater autonomy or even independence (see Map 22.1).

This was social revolution, and it quickly demonstrated the inadequacy of the Provisional Government, which had come to power after the tsar abdicated. Consisting of middle-class politicians and some socialist leaders, that government was divided and ineffectual, unable or unwilling to meet the demands of Russia's revolutionary masses. Nor was it willing to take Russia out of the war, as many were now demanding. Impatience and outrage against the Provisional Government provided an opening for more radical groups. The most effective were the Bolsheviks, a small socialist party with a determined and charismatic leader, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, more commonly known as Lenin. He had long believed that Russia, despite its industrial backwardness, was nonetheless ready for a socialist revolution that would, he expected, spark further revolutions in the more developed countries of Europe (see

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Why were the Bolsheviks able to ride the Russian Revolution to power?

Document 18.5, pp. 864–65). Thus backward Russia would be a catalyst for a more general socialist breakthrough. It was a striking revision of Marxist thinking to accommodate the conditions of a largely agrarian Russian society.

In the desperate circumstances of 1917, his party's message—an end to the war, land for the peasants, workers' control of factories, self-determination for non-Russian nationalities—resonated with an increasingly rebellious public mood, particularly in the major cities. Lenin and the Bolsheviks also called for the dissolution of the Provisional Government and a transfer of state power to the new soviets. On the basis of this program, the Bolsheviks—claiming to act on behalf of the highly popular soviets, in which they had a major presence—seized power in late October during an overnight coup in the capital city of St. Petersburg. Members of the discredited Provisional Government fled or were arrested, even as the Bolsheviks also seized power elsewhere in the country.

Taking or claiming power was one thing; holding on to it was another. A three-year civil war followed in which the Bolsheviks, now officially calling their party “communist,” battled an assortment of enemies—tsarist officials, landlords, disaffected socialists, and regional nationalist forces, as well as troops from the United States, Britain, France, and Japan, all of which were eager to crush the fledgling communist regime. Remarkably, the Bolsheviks held on and by 1921 had staggered to victory over their divided and uncoordinated opponents. That remarkable victory was assisted by the Bolsheviks' willingness to sign a separate peace treaty with Germany, thus taking Russia out of World War I in early 1918, but at a great, though temporary, loss of Russian territory.

During the civil war (1918–1921), the Bolsheviks had harshly regimented the economy, seized grain from angry peasants, suppressed nationalist rebellions, and perpetrated bloody atrocities, as did their enemies as well. But they also had integrated many lower-class men into the Red Army, as Bolshevik military forces were known, and into new local governments, providing them an avenue of social mobility not previously available. By battling foreign troops from the United States, Britain, France, and Japan, the Bolsheviks claimed to be defending Russia from imperialists and protecting the downtrodden masses from their exploiters. The civil war exaggerated even further the Bolsheviks' authoritarian tendencies and their inclination to use force. Shortly after that war ended, they renamed their country the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and set about its transformation.

For the next twenty-five years, the Soviet Union remained a communist island in a capitalist sea. The next major extension of communist control occurred in Eastern Europe in the aftermath of World War II, but it took place quite differently than in Russia. The war had ended with Soviet military forces occupying much of Eastern Europe. Furthermore, Stalin, the USSR's longtime leader, had determined that Soviet security required “friendly” governments in the region so as to permanently end the threat of invasion from the West. When the Marshall Plan seemed to suggest American plans to incorporate Eastern Europe into a Western economic network,

Stalin acted to install fully communist governments, loyal to himself, in Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. Backed by the pressure and presence of the Soviet army, communism was largely imposed on Eastern Europe from outside rather than growing out of a domestic revolution, as had happened in Russia itself.

Local communist parties, however, had some domestic support, deriving from their role in the resistance against the Nazis and their policies of land reform. In Hungary and Poland, for example, communist pressures led to the redistribution of much land to poor or landless peasants, and in free elections in Czechoslovakia in 1946, communists received 38 percent of the vote. Furthermore, in Yugoslavia, a genuinely popular communist movement had played a leading role in the struggle against Nazi occupation and came to power on its own with little Soviet help. Its leader, Josef Broz, known as Tito, openly defied Soviet efforts to control it, claiming that "our goal is that everyone should be master in his own house."²

China: A Prolonged Revolutionary Struggle

Communism triumphed in the ancient land of China in 1949, about thirty years after the Russian Revolution, likewise on the heels of war and domestic upheaval. But that revolution, which was a struggle of decades rather than a single year, was far different from its earlier Russian counterpart. The Chinese imperial system had collapsed in 1911, under the pressure of foreign imperialism, its own inadequacies, and mounting internal opposition (see pp. 888–89). Unlike Russia, where intellectuals had been discussing socialism for half a century or more before the revolution, the ideas of Karl Marx were barely known in China in the early twentieth century. Not until 1921 was a small Chinese Communist Party (CCP) founded, aiming its efforts initially at organizing the country's minuscule urban working class.

Over the next twenty-eight years, that small party, with an initial membership of only sixty people, grew enormously, transformed its strategy, found a charismatic leader in Mao Zedong, engaged in an epic struggle with its opponents, fought the Japanese heroically, and in 1949 emerged victorious as the rulers

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What was the appeal of communism in China before 1949?

Mao Zedong and the Long March

An early member of China's then minuscule Communist Party, Mao rose to a position of dominant leadership during the Long March of 1934–1935, when beleaguered communists from southeastern China trekked to a new base area in the north. This photograph shows Mao on his horse during that epic journey of some 6,000 miles. (Collection J.A. Fox/Magnum Photos)

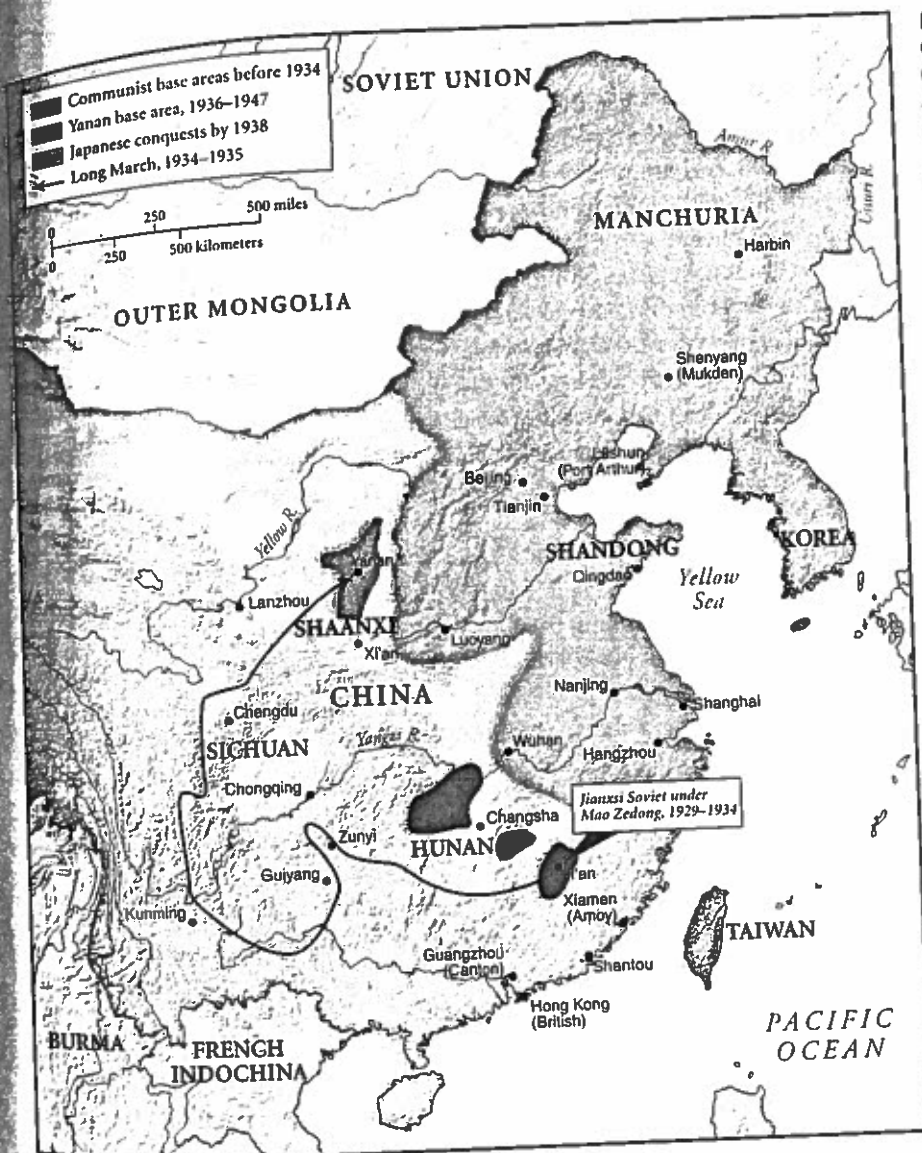


of China. The victory was all the more surprising because the CCP faced a far more formidable foe than the weak Provisional Government over which the Bolsheviks had triumphed in Russia. That opponent was the Guomindang (Nationalist Party), which governed China after 1928. Led by a military officer, Chiang Kai-shek, that party promoted a measure of modern development (railroads, light industry, banking, airline services) in the decade that followed. However, the impact of these achievements was limited largely to the cities, leaving the rural areas, where most people lived, still impoverished. The Guomindang's base of support was also narrow, deriving from urban elites, rural landlords, and Western powers.

Chased out of China's cities in a wave of Guomindang-inspired anticommunist terror in 1927, the CCP groped its way toward a new revolutionary strategy, quite at odds with both classical Marxism and Russian practice. Whereas the Bolsheviks had found their primary audience among workers in Russia's major cities, Chinese communists increasingly looked to the country's peasant villages for support. Thus European Marxism was adapted once again, this time to fit the situation in a mostly peasant China. Still, it was no easy sell. Chinese peasants did not rise up spontaneously against their landlords, as Russian peasants had. However, years of guerrilla warfare, experiments with land reform in areas under communist control, efforts to empower women, and the creation of a communist military force to protect liberated areas from Guomindang attack and landlord reprisals—all of this slowly gained for the CCP a growing measure of respect and support among China's peasants. In the process, Mao Zedong, the son of a prosperous Chinese peasant family and a professional revolutionary since the early 1920s, emerged as the party's leader.

It was Japan's brutal invasion of China that gave the CCP a decisive opening, for that attack destroyed Guomindang control over much of the country and forced it to retreat to the interior, where it became even more dependent on conservative landlords. The CCP, by contrast, grew from just 40,000 members in 1937 to more than 1.2 million in 1945, while the communist-led People's Liberation Army mushroomed to 900,000 men, supported by an additional 2 million militia troops (see Map 22.2). Much of this growing support derived from the vigor with which the CCP waged war against the Japanese invaders. Using guerrilla warfare techniques learned in the struggle against the Guomindang, communist forces established themselves behind enemy lines and, despite periodic setbacks, offered a measure of security to many Chinese faced with Japanese atrocities. The Guomindang, by contrast, sometimes seemed to be more interested in eliminating the communists than in actively fighting the Japanese. Furthermore, in the areas it controlled, the CCP reduced rents, taxes, and interest payments for peasants; taught literacy to adults; and mobilized women for the struggle. As the war drew to a close, more radical action followed. Teams of activists, called cadres, encouraged poor peasants to "speak bitterness" in public meetings, to "struggle" with landlords, and to "settle accounts" with them.

Thus the CCP frontally addressed both of China's major problems—foreign imperialism and peasant exploitation. It expressed Chinese nationalism as well as a demand for radical social change. It gained a reputation for honesty that contrasted



Map 22.2 The Rise of Communism in China
Communism arose in China at the same time as the country was engaged in a terrible war with Japan and in the context of a civil war with Guomindang forces.

sharply with the massive corruption of Guomindang officials. It put down deep roots among the peasantry in a way that the Bolsheviks never did. And whereas the Bolsheviks gained support by urging Russian withdrawal from the highly unpopular First World War, the CCP won support by aggressively pursuing the struggle against Japanese invaders during World War II. In 1949, four years after the war's end, the Chinese communists swept to victory over the Guomindang, many of whose followers fled to Taiwan. Mao Zedong announced triumphantly in Beijing's Tiananmen Square that "the Chinese people have stood up."

might have been the most influential reform of all. They did not restructure the landholding patterns that left wealthy landlords in charge of impoverished peasants. The reformers were urban people, and they were frequently related to the landlords; they had little practical sympathy for the agricultural laborers and no intention of sharing power or profits with them.

The Mexican Revolution, 1910-20 In 1910, in Mexico, urban and rural leaders rose up against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1830-1915), who had been ruling the country since 1876. At the age of eighty, Díaz seemed poised to retire from the presidency. Under his leadership Mexico had seen the development of mining, oil drilling, and railways, in addition to increasing exports of raw agricultural products, especially henequen fibers used in making rope. The middle-class urban creole elite had prospered, but the salaries of the urban workers had declined, and rural peasants had fared even worse. Ninety-five percent of the rural peasantry owned no land, while fewer than 200 Mexican families owned 25 percent of all of the land of Mexico, and foreign investors owned another 20-25 percent. One single hacienda spread over 13 million acres and another over 11 million acres. Huge tracts of land lay fallow and unused while peasants went hungry. Finally, on a political level, no system of orderly succession had been worked out for Mexico. The reins of power rested in the hands of Díaz and his allies alone.

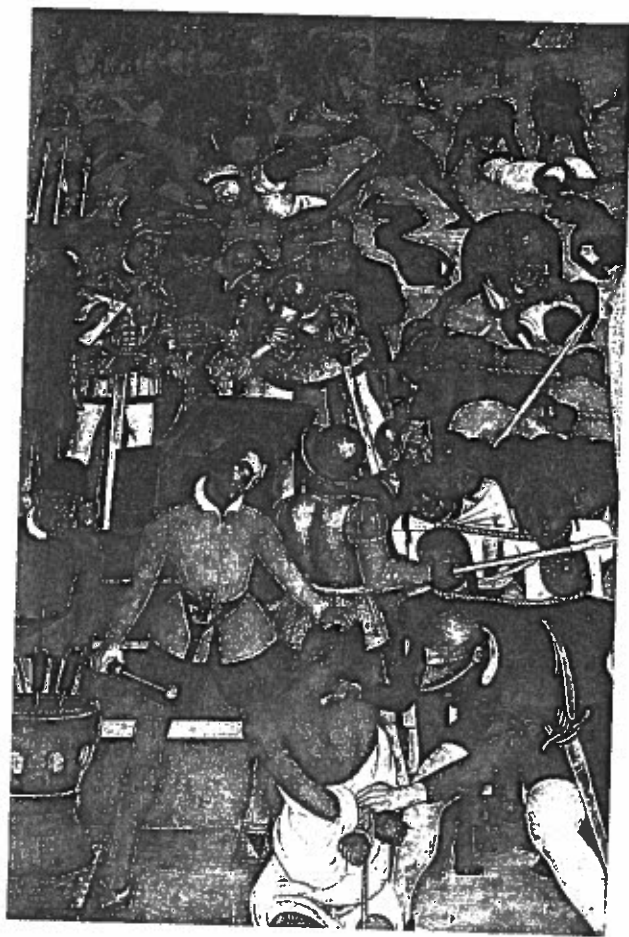
Democratic voting existed for a limited electorate, but when Díaz changed his mind and ran again for president, he imprisoned his principal challenger, Francisco Madero (1873-1913). Díaz won, but rebellions against his continuing rule broke out across Mexico, and he soon resigned and went into exile in Paris. Regional leaders then asserted their influence as Mexico erupted into civil war. The warfare was both personal and factional. It concerned differences in policy among the factions and the appropriate division of power between the central government and the states.

Many of the leaders who contested for power were mestizos, people of mixed race and culture (see Chapter 15), who demanded a dramatic break with the past control by the creole elite. The two most radical, Francisco "Pancho" Villa (1878-1923) from the northern border region and Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919) from the state of Morelos, just south of Mexico City, advocated significant land reform, and implemented it in the areas they captured during the civil war.

They attracted mixed groups of followers, including farm workers, agricultural colonists, former soldiers, unemployed laborers, cowboys, and delinquents. In November 1911, Zapata declared the revolutionary Plan of Ayala, which called for the return of land to Indian pueblos (villages). Tens of thousands of impoverished peasants followed him, heeding his cry of "Tierra y Libertad" ("Land and Liberty") and accepting his view that it was "Better to die on one's feet than to live on one's knees." Zapata's supporters seized large sugar estates, haciendas with which they had been in conflict for years. By including previously scorned groups and attending to their agendas, the revolution became more radical and agrarian.

Mexican revolutionaries. General Francisco "Pancho" Villa and Emiliano Zapata (right), sporting his flamboyant moustache, sit together with their Mexican revolutionary army, men who had come from many different occupations and walks of life to join the ranks. The radical leaders hailed from different parts of the country, Zapata from south of Mexico City and Villa from the northern border, but they shared common goals.





Diego Rivera, *The Conquest of Mexico* (detail), 1929-30. Rivera transformed the tradition of painting in Mexico by creating huge murals that tell the history of Mexico in often brutal scenes.

revolution. On the material level, not much changed at first. In 1920, Obregón deposed Carranza and became president. He distributed 3 million acres of land to peasants, 10 percent of whom benefited. This redistribution helped to establish the principles of the revolution, demonstrating good faith on the part of the state and putting new land into production, although the state did not provide the technical assistance needed to improve productivity. Politically, Obregón began to include new constituencies in his government, including the labor movement, represented by a Labor Party, and the peasants, represented by a National Agrarian Party. The institutionalization of their presence in government promised new stability through wider

Diego Rivera, *Man at the Crossroads* (detail), 1934. Rivera's fame spread and he was invited to create a mural for the Rockefeller Center in New York. When John D. Rockefeller saw Rivera's tribute to Karl Marx and communism, he had the mural destroyed. Rivera recreated it at the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City.

With Díaz in exile, Madero became president, but he was removed by a coup and then assassinated in 1913. General Victoriano Huerta (1854-1916) attempted to take over and to reestablish a repressive government like that of Díaz. Opposed by all the other major leaders, and also by President Woodrow Wilson of the United States, who sent American troops into Veracruz to express his displeasure with Huerta, the general was forced from power in March 1914. Alvaro Obregón (1880-1928), another general, who made free use of the machine gun, won out militarily, but he agreed to serve under Venustiano Carranza (1859-1920), who had himself installed as provisional president.

The civil war continued, and control of Mexico City changed hands several times, but ultimately the more conservative leaders, Carranza and Obregón, forced out Villa and Zapata. Carranza became president in 1916 and convened a constituent assembly that produced the Mexican Constitution of 1917, promising land reform and imposing restrictions on foreign economic control. It protected Mexican workers by passing a labor code including minimum salaries and maximum hours, accident insurance, pensions, social benefits, and the right to unionize and strike. It placed severe restrictions on the church and clergy, denying them the rights to own property and to provide primary education. (Most of the revolutionaries were anti-clerical. Zapata was an exception in this, as the peasantry who followed him were extremely devoted to the church.) The constitution also decreed that no foreigner could be a minister or priest, vote, hold office, or criticize the government.

Enacting the new laws was easier than implementing them, but having the new constitution in place set a standard of accountability for government and served as a beacon for the continuing



representation. The representation, everyone recognized, was not only by social class but also by ethnicity and culture. Mestizos and even indigenous Indians achieved a place in government. Mexico's struggle against the threefold problems of racial discrimination against Indians, economic discrimination against the poor, and the denial of both problems behind a façade of political rhetoric was an inspiration throughout Latin America. It had come at a high price: one million killed out of a total population of about 15 million.

The Ottoman Empire

Unlike Mexico, which was generally dependent on European powers for its economic investment capital and initiatives, the Ottoman Empire retained its economic autonomy, although French capital was used to construct its major technological achievement, the Suez Canal. Unlike India, the empire did not lose its sovereignty, but like China, it lost many of the attributes of self-rule, while remaining formally independent. The Ottoman Empire fell behind the industrial and political developments in western Europe and America, and it slowly disintegrated. The process by which the Ottoman Empire became "the Sick Man of Europe" took more than a century. We have already reviewed the first stages.

In 1798, Napoleon successfully invaded Ottoman Egypt. He was expelled not by the Ottomans but by his European enemy, the British. Then the Albanian general dispatched by the Ottomans in 1805 to control Egypt, Muhammad Ali, established Egypt's virtual independence of the Ottomans. In 1830, after an eight-year civil war, in which it gained the military support of Britain, France, and, especially, Russia, Greece won its independence from the Ottomans. One year earlier, as a result of the same struggles, three Balkan states—Serbia, Wallachia, and Moldavia—had also gained their autonomy from the Ottomans. Despite the *Tanzimat* (reorganization) reforms of its administration and army, leading to a parliamentary constitution in 1876, Turkey was defeated by Russia in war the next year, and the year after that, Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania became independent. In 1881, European bankers declared that the Ottoman Empire was not properly managing its finances and was defaulting on its debts. The Europeans demanded and got official representation in the offices of the Ottoman treasury. European powers also claimed rights to intervene in internal Ottoman affairs in order to defend the rights of Christian communities living in the Islamic Ottoman Empire. They stationed representatives of various Christian denominations in Constantinople to assert and represent those rights. Nevertheless, fearing continuing revolt from the restless community of Armenian Christians in Anatolia, the Ottoman government supported a series of attacks on them, killing about 200,000 in 1895.

In 1908, a group of progressive army officers and liberal professionals—collectively called "Young Turks"—seized control of the government under the sultan. During these years, however, the dismemberment of the empire continued. Almost all of its remaining European and North African holdings were stripped away. Bulgaria declared its independence (1908) and Bosnia was annexed by Austria-Hungary (1908). Italy seized the North African territories of Libya and the offshore Dodecanese Islands. Bulgaria, Serbia, and Greece aided Albania in gaining its independence in 1912.

A second Balkan war in the next year concerned the appropriate size of Bulgaria and control over Albania. Serbians, Greeks, Austrians, and even Italians were involved. The decision, favored by Austria, to make Albania an independent kingdom infuriated the Serbians, who wanted to control the region for its access to the sea, and agitated the Russians, who had backed the Serbians as brother Slavs. The economic and military competition among the great powers was embedded in these still larger